

Found: When Ordinary People Meet Jesus – Jesus and the Scam Artist

Luke 19:1-10

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Over the last few weeks we've been inviting our friends to church on Sunday night and if you're here for the first time or if you've come along at the invitation of a friend, we do want you to know how glad we are that you are with us. Each week we've been thinking about a different episode from the Biblical records of Jesus' life in which His encounters with ordinary people leave them wonderfully changed. We looked at Jesus and the church-goer, and the church-goer discovered he needed more than religion. He needed a whole new start; a new birth in fact. And then last time we looked at Jesus and the outsider, someone who was on the fringes whom Jesus brought right in to the heart of His family, the church. Tonight we're going to be thinking about what happens when Jesus meets a scam artist, a real outsider, someone no one wanted to know at all. So let me ask you to go ahead right now and take your copy of the Bible from the pockets which you'll find in the pew just in front of you and open them to page 878. Page 878. You'll see about halfway down the left column the beginning of chapter 19 in Luke's gospel and we're going to read the first ten verses together. Before we read, it is our custom to pause briefly to pray and ask for God to help us understand His Word. So would you bow your heads with me as we pray together?

Our Father, we thank You that the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost. Some of us may well be lost here tonight so we pray as Your Word is read and preached, would You have mercy on us and come to us in the power of the Holy Spirit so that Jesus might call and change forever lost hearts here, just as He did Zacchaeus in our passage tonight. We pray that the Son of Man might find some of those who are lost among us and that He would save them. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

Luke's gospel, chapter 19, reading verses 1 through 10:

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. And there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small of stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. And when

Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

When Ordinary People meet Jesus

One of the aims of these Sunday night sermons has been to help us see the sheer range and diversity of people that Jesus' ministry touched and changed so that we might begin to grasp that whoever we are, whatever our background, whatever the baggage we carry, there is a Savior for you, for us, in Him. And so, as we said a moment ago, we've seen Him lovingly instruct Nicodemus, the religious and zealous church-goer. And Jesus showed Nicodemus the great need of his life wasn't really more religion, not really. What he needed most was a radical new start. He needed to be born again and only Jesus could provide that for him. And then we saw last time, we saw Jesus reach a Canaanite woman who was the epitome of a cultural outsider, so much so in fact that even the disciples who were with Jesus wanted to get rid of her as soon as possible. And yet her outsider status notwithstanding, a remarkable faith in Christ shone through with wonderful clarity, trusting in Jesus for her meant that this outsider actually came to belong in God's family after all.

And in our study this evening we watch Jesus deal with someone who is quite different again, neither elite nor religiously inclined. He's not looking for help like the Canaanite woman, neither is he trying his best somehow to please God like Nicodemus. Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector, verse 2, is a rich man and what's more he's a bad man. His riches are the fruit of state sanctioned protection racket. He tells us as much himself in verse 8, doesn't he? He uses his position collecting taxes for the Romans, he says, to defraud people. Working for the IRS probably means you'd not win many friends at a dinner party, I suspect. That wasn't Zacchaeus' problem. It's not that he has an unpopular but necessary job. It is rather that he is swindling ordinary people out of their money to line his own pockets. He is a scam artist. Wealthy he may have been, but Zacchaeus was a crook. And yet, and here's the key point, Jesus wants him. Jesus cares about him. He saves, and as we'll see, He rescues him. There really is no one beyond the reach of Jesus' grace, is there? No one.

Let's take a look at the passage together and see how Jesus deals with Zacchaeus. Notice just for a moment the way the passage is structured. It divides neatly into two, with each half following the same general pattern. So after the opening two verses of introduction, Luke tells us about the crowds, verse 3,

Zacchaeus' response, verse 4, and Jesus' answer, verse 5, and then the pattern repeats - the crowds, verse 7, Zacchaeus' response, verse 8, and Jesus' answer, verses 9 and 10. So there are two movements, two sections, of the passage. And we could sum up each section of the passage in one word. In verses 1 to 5 the word would be found. Zacchaeus was found by Jesus. And then in verses 6 to 10 the word would be changed. Having been found, he'd never be the same again. I'm not really sure it would be possible to summarize what Jesus can do for us more succinctly than that. Here is the Gospel in two words - found and changed. That is what Jesus does. He finds us in our lost condition and He changes us.

I. Zacchaeus was Found

Let's look at verses 1 to 5 first of all. Zacchaeus was found. In verse 3 we learn that our diminutive scam artist was intrigued by Jesus. Luke says he did not know who Jesus was. There were crowds, however, beginning to gather in anticipation of this celebrity rabbi from out of town coming through the streets of Jericho. And Zacchaeus' curiosity has been peeked. But being a small man, he could not get close enough for a good look. One rather imagines the crowd, the people of Jericho among whom Zacchaeus labored and worked and from whom he earned his living, rather closing ranks when they saw him coming just to make sure he could not get a good look. It was a little spiteful, perhaps. A tiny victory against a man who took their money and sided with their enemies. But you can't really blame the crowd, can you? Zacchaeus was cheating them, after all, and they could not do much about it, so they did this. And Zacchaeus was left on the outside, unable to see. But he is a man of some ingenuity, and not to be put off, he knows that along the route Jesus will take just up ahead there is a sycamore tree. So he runs on and climbs the tree to get a better vantage point. It was a surreptitious action. Covert. Intended to preserve his anonymity while providing a good spot from which to gawk at this unusual rabbi from out of town.

Scandalous Grace

And so it's not hard to picture the shock and embarrassment of what happens next, is it? Just as Jesus was drawing up alongside the sycamore tree, He stops suddenly and looks up and every eye in that crowd I'm sure followed His gaze. And there's Zacchaeus' dignity now completely shattered, hanging from a branch, blushing furiously. Perhaps the crowds are now all snickering behind their hands at him, enjoying his latest misfortune, and then suddenly Jesus speaks. Verse 5 - "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." Jesus invites Himself over to spend the night and the gasps of shock spread like wildfire through the crowds. Now understand what's going on. In the culture Zacchaeus inhabited, opening your home to someone, sharing your life with them, eating together, it was seen as an act of deep identification and solidarity, expressed communion and affinity and fellowship. Who you ate with said a great deal about you. Who you welcomed and who was welcomed by you

and who welcomed you signaled to everyone your affinities and alliances and it reinforced bonds of acceptable social relationships. And here is Jesus riding roughshod over those acceptable social relationships. A rabbi, inviting himself to stay in the home of a chief tax collector - a scandal like that would certainly have made the front page of tomorrow's *Jericho Journal* for sure.

But Jesus is much less concerned about man-made taboos as He is about Zacchaeus' heart. He will happily trample on the prejudices of others to rescue someone from their sin. By inviting Himself into Zacchaeus' home, Jesus is really inserting Himself into Zacchaeus' life. And the crowd are well aware of that; that's why they're so upset in verse 7. They all grumbled, we are told. "He's gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." They understand there's more going on here than Jesus finding a B&B for the night. No, Jesus is connecting with Zacchaeus, He's entering his world, stepping into his territory, breaking into his life. And I do hope you noticed as all of this takes place that Jesus calls him by name. Don't miss that. It tells us Jesus knows Zacchaeus already. Zacchaeus had been looking for Jesus, driven at best by idle curiosity, but all the while Jesus has been looking for him driven by something much weightier.

No Coincidence: A Divine Appointment of Grace

Listen to the strong imperative Jesus uses when He invites Himself over. "I must stay at your house today." Now what can He mean? Surely there would have been no shortage of available lodgings in a city like Jericho. He must stay with Zacchaeus of all people? Zacchaeus, that crook? Surely not! But the necessity that Jesus was under was governed by something far more compelling than a lack of alternative accommodation. The compulsion placed on Jesus is a divine compulsion. This is a divine appointment that Jesus was keeping with Zacchaeus. He came to Jericho looking for Zacchaeus. His path passed beside that sycamore tree in order to meet Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus thought he climbed that particular tree to see Jesus without being seen in return, when in fact, by God's ordination, he climbed that tree so that seeing Jesus, Jesus would see him.

Maybe you are here tonight with little more than a passing interest at best. Yours is an idle curiosity. At most, that's all that could be ascribed to you when it comes to Jesus. You're not here because you're desperately seeking. Perhaps you're here because a friend brought you along. But maybe whatever your reason for being here really is, maybe there's another reason you do not know. Maybe this tonight is your Jericho. Maybe what you intended to be little more than a causal glance Jesus' way will turn out to have been all along a divine appointment. When Jesus finds you and like Zacchaeus, calls you by name, that He might come into your home, into your life, into your heart. Could that be why you're really here? Zacchaeus was found by Jesus. Perhaps you're being found by Him too. Known and called by Jesus. Maybe Jesus is breaking in upon you when you least expect it.

II. Zacchaeus was Changed

But then secondly do notice in verses 6 to 10 the second key word that sums up the passage. First Zacchaeus was found and now we see that having been found Zacchaeus was wonderfully changed. Jesus has called Zacchaeus to hurry and come down and so, verse 6, “he hurried and came down.” You can’t help wondering if Luke’s redundant description of Zacchaeus’ descent here might not in fact be an attempt to spare the man’s dignity. There is a mischievous part inside of me that pictures poor, blushing Zacchaeus doing what I’m sure would have happened to me, at least, if I’d been caught dangling from a sycamore branch on that day. I’d have made haste and come down with the dramatic assistance of gravity! However it happened in Zacchaeus’ case, nothing could dent his elation at this moment. Something has already happened in his heart, hasn’t it? Instead of the shame and embarrassment that drove him up the tree in the first place, there’s joy on the ground at the feet of Jesus now. He receives Jesus with joy.

Luke is actually describing Zacchaeus’ response in terms designed to echo the words of Jesus earlier in the Gospel story when He sent His disciples out on mission into the towns and villages. Back in Luke chapter 10, He had sent His disciples out and in verses 8 and 9 He gave them this instruction. “Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you, heal the sick and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’” Being received was the term Jesus used to describe the response of people to whom the kingdom of God has come near. That is exactly how Luke describes Zacchaeus’ response to Jesus here as he receives Him into his home with joy.

But as we’ve seen, the crowds are frustrated, verse 7. They’re scandalized. And so Zacchaeus shows us just how far the change that being found by Jesus has produced in his life really goes. He stands up in front of them all, verse 8, and makes this remarkable public declaration. It’s spoken to Jesus but it’s for the hearing of all the others, especially the grumbling crowd. Look at it with me, verse 8 - “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone anything I restore it fourfold.” Now remember, Zacchaeus is a man addicted to money. He has preyed upon the people who are now surrounding him, whispering to one another as they steal scornful glances in his direction. And here’s the great evidence, clear and undisputable, that when Jesus breaks into a life they are changed forever.

The Change that Jesus brings: Freedom and Repentance

Two things. First, he shows us that the idol of money no longer possesses his soul. Instead of stealing and cheating and abusing power to get riches from others, Zacchaeus now commits to using riches for the good of others. “The half

of my goods I give to the poor.” When Jesus finds you, you find true riches in Him. When Jesus finds you, you find true riches in Him. He becomes all you really need and He becomes the great prize of your life. And understanding that will set you free to be sacrificial and generous and giving. That’s what happened in Zacchaeus’ life.

And the second thing we see in him is repentance. Look at the text. “If I have defrauded anyone of anything, restore it fourfold.” Now this is not a non-apology, apology. We’ve all done them, haven’t we? Admit it, husbands especially; you know the one. “Well I’m sorry *if* I offended you, dear!” That’s not an apology. It implies, “I don’t really think I’ve offended you at all, but I can see you’re upset, so in order to get out of the fight I’ll say sorry.” “I’m sorry *if* I offended you.” That’s what Nicodemus is saying here. He is saying actually, “Whoever I’ve defrauded, no matter the amount, no matter the person, no matter the situation, I will quadruple their loss and restore it to them at my own cost.” He comes clean, publically confesses his sin. He makes restitution at his own expense. He is a radically changed man, isn’t he? The joy of being found by Jesus brings change, and that change is manifested first and always in repentance. When Jesus comes into our lives the old life no longer rules. The apostle Paul puts it this way in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come!” True repentance is a mark of spiritual authenticity, of having been made new by Jesus Christ. It is evidence that Jesus has come to dwell with you, that He’s broken in upon you for real. Moral change is not the condition on the basis of which Jesus will accept you. Zacchaeus did not clean himself up first and then Jesus, compelled by the remarkable spectacle of this transformed individual felt that He just had to have Zacchaeus in His kingdom and so He called him to Himself. Not at all. Zacchaeus was a mess, hiding from everyone in the sycamore tree when Jesus took hold. He did not change first, but when Jesus broke into his life change was the inevitable and necessary fruit.

That’s what Jesus wants to do in your heart and life, you know. It’s a scary business hearing Jesus call to you in the Gospel. He wants to come into your life and when He does, get ready because nothing will be the same again. So count the cost. Zacchaeus did. And compared to having Jesus, for Zacchaeus all his riches were no object. With joy he received Jesus and he let his riches go. And so Jesus concludes in the only way really possible on the evidence before Him. Verse 9, “Today salvation has come to this house since he too is a son of Abraham.” He’s a changed man and Jesus publically proclaims it.

To Seek and to Save the Lost

And then, Jesus makes this final climactic declaration in verse 10. Look at it please. Here’s really the point of the whole passage. Here’s the message of God for us. Don’t miss it. “The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost.” Lost people like Zacchaeus are the reason the Son of Man, the Lord Jesus came. The

crowds were scandalized that Jesus wanted anything to do with him. For them, it's good people - people who clean up their act, people who pull themselves up by their bootstraps - it's people like that who deserve the favor and grace of God. Swindlers and crooks, scam artists and racketeers like Zacchaeus, well they have no place in God's kingdom as far as they're concerned and Jesus had no business staying in his home. But that is not Jesus' perspective at all. For Jesus it's not the good who get His grace; it is those who know "there is no one righteous, no not one." It's not those who have cleaned up their act first but rather those who know the stain of sin in their life goes deeper than they could ever efface. Those who know they are the lost ones are the ones Jesus came to seek and save.

Sometimes I think we're a bit like husbands driving with their wives lost in a strange city. You know how it goes. Your wife pleads with you to stop and ask the man on the corner for directions. What do you do, men? No, no; you've got it covered, right? You know the way. You can find your way out of this mess. "Oh please let's use the GPS at least!" "No, no! Don't say another word, just trust me. I know where I'm going!" And then after a few lefts and rights and a couple of times around the block we have to confess, don't we, we're lost; we need help. And it's not till then that we get un-lost. It's not until we admit we need help, till we face the facts that we stop getting more lost and start getting the help that we need. It's the lost that Jesus came for. Time to admit your true condition. Stop going it alone, stop turning every which way in an attempt to work your way out of your predicament. You're only making yourself more lost with each passing moment. Stop trying to fix yourself before you come to Jesus. Just come to Jesus now. Just come to Jesus now, as you are. Maybe this is your Jericho. Maybe He is calling you by name. Maybe today salvation will come to your house. Maybe today if you'll stop running and start repenting, stop working and start believing, maybe today you will receive Jesus with joy and nothing will be the same again for you. I do hope you'll consider the call of Christ on your life. It's a call to face your helplessness and to turn to Him.

If you'd like to talk about the message this evening I'd love to chat with you down at the front after the service. Alternatively, as Kevin said earlier, you could fill out the response panel and put it in one of the baskets at the exits as you leave and let us know you'd like to explore the Gospel further that way. No matter how you respond to us, you need to know we're praying for you that Jesus Christ will break in on your life, into your heart, that salvation would come to your house this day, that repentance, deep and real and thoroughgoing and solid, would be the great evidence that you have been found and changed forever. Would you pray with me please?

Father, we thank You that Jesus Christ is a perfect Savior for the worst of us. And for those of us who think we are the best, help us, all of us, the least and the best, to see our true lostness apart from Him. And grant that we might be found by Him like Zacchaeus, and being found give us the grace of repentance as we

receive Him with joy that we, like Zacchaeus, might never be the same again. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

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